

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Katherine Villeda, and I am a Resident from Bridgeport. I am an immigrant rights leader and member of CT Students for a Dream. I am also the daughter of formerly undocumented parents.

I stand in support of S.B. No. 284: “AN ACT INCREASING THE AGE FROM EIGHT TO EIGHTEEN YEARS FOR AN INCOME-ELIGIBLE PERSON TO OBTAIN MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS.” I am happy to see the introduction of this bill after the passage of HB 6687 last year. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 18 regardless of immigration status builds off of last years efforts and is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the care we all deserve, and to reduce the uninsured rate in Connecticut.

I believe that healthcare is a human right and that no one should be denied the care they need because of their immigration status. Growing up in a mixed-status family, I witnessed first-hand the barriers my loved ones, friends and many community members faced in accessing primary and preventative services because of their immigration status. Care was often delayed because of the fear and uncertainty that came with disclosing one’s status to a medical provider and the possibility of astronomical medical debt. Growing up home remedies were often used until they no longer helped with underlying ailments and emergent care was needed.

Professionally, I am a healthcare policy analyst at a leading national health care organization where my work primarily focuses on providing policy support to state advocates across the country working towards healthcare coverage for residents in their states regardless of their immigration status, like Connecticut is. As my home state, Connecticut stands out to me as the *only* state in the country that has put an arbitrary cut off for which children should be covered based on their age. Passage of SB 284 this year would remove that unnecessary barrier and ensure that children will not age out of coverage once they turn 9 years old and be left without healthcare. A child does not and should not suddenly become less deserving of accessing health care once they turn nine years old. If we want healthy children, we must treat them with dignity and respect, and provide them with the care they need throughout their entire childhood and into adulthood.

Additionally, our work doesn’t end with expanding access up to age 18; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including caregivers and adults. When I was three years old my mother had a stroke and was admitted to the hospital. My family was fortunate that Emergency Medicaid covered the costs of my mother’s emergent care and saved her life. However, due to the lack of access to health insurance because of her status, the care she needed after she was discharged was costly and scarce. The underlying cause of her stroke was identified and had she had access to preventative care, her stroke may have been prevented. My father also did not see a doctor for over 20 years. Studies show how a parent’s immigration status has a direct impact on whether or not their child is insured and how often they utilize health care

services.¹² Providing coverage for caregivers will turn support better take-up rates for children and utilization of primary and preventative services.

Access to affordable and comprehensive healthcare for everyone regardless of immigration status is critical to racial and economic justice issue. Lack of access to healthcare disproportionately impacts people of color of all ages, especially Latinx and Black people. Passage of S.B. 284 is a step in the right direction to ensure that access to healthcare is accessible to those already at increased risk of being left out due to racial and classist discriminatory policies and systems.

As we continue to live in a global pandemic and with the removal of mask mandates in schools, it is imperative for CT to continue to be a leader to show what it means to respect and honor immigrants in our state. Immigrant children deserve access to accessible and affordable healthcare during a pandemic and beyond. Immigrants have been at the forefront of the pandemic as frontline and essential workers. Despite their essential work, immigrants continue to be excluded from federal and state aid. Although Emergency Medicaid has been expanded to include COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccinations it is not enough. Our families and our communities deserve comprehensive and affordable access to healthcare that goes beyond COVID-19. In order for Connecticut to fully recover from this pandemic and effectively reduce its uninsured rate, we must ensure immigrants have the right to healthcare to truly live healthy lives.

Immigrants should be treated with dignity and respect. I believe Connecticut has the resources, moral obligation, and political will to be a leader in what it means to treat healthcare like a human right and treat immigrants with dignity.

I support S.B. 284 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. I also recommend that the coverage date be pushed up sooner for children and for postpartum people. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,
Katherine Villeda

¹ **Parental Immigrant Status is Associated with Children's Health Care Utilization** (*Maternal and*

² **Parents' and Caregivers' Health Insurance Supports Children's Healthy Development** (*Society for Research in Child Development*)